

THE BEATLES

A N T H O L O G Y



B Y T H E B E A T L E S

RINGO: This was the point of our lives when we found pills, uppers. That's the only way we could continue playing for so long. They were called Preludin, and you could buy them over the counter. We never thought we were doing anything wrong, but we'd get really wired and go on for days. So with beer and Preludin, that's how we survived.

JOHN: The first drugs I ever took, I was still at art school, with the group (we all took it together), was Benzedrine from the inside of an inhaler...⁷⁴

GEORGE: There was a bearded guy from a suburb of London, a Beat Poet named Royston Ellis. He came up to Liverpool to read his poetry and we were used to back him. Ellis had discovered that if you open a Vick's inhaler you find Benzedrine in it, impregnated into the cardboard inside. (He later exposed this fact to the *News of the World*.)

JOHN: The beatnik, a sort of English version of Allen Ginsberg, was turning everybody onto this inside of an inhaler, and everybody thought, 'Wow! What's this?' and talked their mouths off for a night.

In Hamburg the waiters always had Preludin (and various other pills, but I remember Preludin because it was a big trip) and they were all taking these pills to keep themselves awake, to work these incredible hours in this all-night place. And so the waiters, when they'd see the musicians falling over with tiredness or with drink, they'd give you the pill. You'd take the pill, you'd be talking, you'd sober up, you could work almost endlessly – until the pill wore off, then you'd have to have another.⁷⁴

GEORGE: We were frothing at the mouth. Because we had all these hours to play and the club owners were giving us Preludins, which were slimming tablets. I don't think they were amphetamine, but they were uppers. So we used to be up there foaming, stomping away.

We went berserk inasmuch as we got drunk a lot and we played wildly and then they gave us these pills. I remember lying in bed, sweating from Preludin, thinking, 'Why aren't I sleeping?'

PAUL: My dad was a very wise working-class guy, so he saw it all coming. As a lad going out to Hamburg on my own, I'd been forewarned: 'Drugs and pills: WATCH OUT, right?' So in Hamburg, when the Preludin came around I was probably the last one to have it. It was: 'Oh, I'll stick to the beer, thanks.'

They'd all get high, and I'd come up just on the buzz. I remember John turning to me, 'Blah, blah, blah,' saying, 'What are you on?' and I said, 'Nothing, blah, blah.' I'd be talking just as fast as them; their high would do it for me.

I really was frightened of that stuff, because you're taught when you're young to 'watch out for those devil drugs'. I actually saw the dangers and tried to keep away from it at first. Looking back, I realise it was only peer pressure; and to resist seems cooler now than it did at the time. It would have been rather wise and mature of me to say, 'Hey guys, I don't have to do everything you do,' but at the time it just felt like I was being a cissie. And that was the attitude that prevailed.

JOHN: The things we used to do! We used to break the stage down – that was long before The Who came out and broke things; we used to leave guitars playing on stage with no people there. We'd be so drunk, we used to smash the machinery. And this was all through frustration, not as an intellectual thought: 'We will break the stage, we will wear a toilet seat round our neck, we will go on naked.' We just did it, through being drunk.

Paul was telling me that he and I used to have rows about who was the leader. I can't remember them. It had stopped mattering by then. I wasn't so determined to be leader at all costs. If I did argue, it was just out of pride.

All the arguments became trivial, mainly because we were fucked and irritable with working so hard. We were just kids. George threw some food at me once on stage. The row was over something stupid. I said I would smash his face in for him. We had a shouting match, but that was all; I never did anything.⁶⁷ And I once threw a plate of food over George. That's the only violence we ever had between us.⁶⁹

GEORGE: John threw all kinds of stuff over everybody, over the years. I can't remember that happening, but if he said it it must have happened. There were times when he did throw stuff. He got pretty

wired. The down, adverse effects of drink and Preludins, where you'd be up for days, were that you'd start hallucinating and getting a bit weird. John would sometimes get on the edge. He'd come in in the early hours of the morning and be ranting, and I'd be lying there pretending to be asleep, hoping he wouldn't notice me.

One time Paul had a chick in bed and John came in and got a pair of scissors and cut all her clothes into pieces and then wrecked the wardrobe. He got like that occasionally; it was because of the pills and being up too long. But we threw things at the *Germans*; all the bands did.

JOHN: We used to shout in English at the Germans, call them Nazis and tell them to fuck off.⁷⁰

PAUL: One of those days we were doing our stuff and some slightly strange-looking people arrived who didn't look like anyone else. Immediately we felt, 'Wey-hey... kindred spirits... something's going on here.' They came in and sat down and they were Astrid, Jürgen and Klaus. Klaus Voormann later played bass with Manfred Mann. Jürgen was Jürgen Vollmer, who is still a good photographer. So was Astrid Kirchherr, who was to be Stuart's girlfriend – they were the big love. Anyway, they arrived, sat down, and we could see they had something different. And we were also what *they* were looking for.

GEORGE: Astrid was the girlfriend of Klaus at first and they'd had a row one night, so he'd gone off in a huff. He was pissed off with her and he came down to this very bad area of Hamburg, where he would never have gone otherwise. He was walking around and he heard this noise coming out of a cellar so he came into the Kaiserkeller, saw us and thought we were really interesting. He went back and told Astrid and brought her and some of their friends – there were ballet dancers with them – and they started coming in on a regular basis to see us. Astrid and Klaus would come in most frequently. They liked our band and she wanted to photograph us.

PAUL: They all liked the rock'n'roll and the quiffed-back hairdos, but they were different; they all wore black. In fact, we got a lot of our look from them. They called themselves 'Exis' – Existentialists. They were not rockers or mods, but 'Exis'.

We were still in rocker mode but, as I say, a little bit different from the other groups: different material, different sense of humour. Stuart had got himself looking like James Dean. He would put his shades on and stand there with his bass – it was all a big pose. At first, they were blown away by Stuart: they evidently weren't looking for musicianship – it was image. And when Stuart turned out to be a painter, and as John was an art student and *they* were art students, there was this great connection. So we had drinks with them and chatted, and soon really got to know them well.

STUART SUTCLIFFE: *Just recently I have found the most wonderful friends, the most beautiful looking trio I have ever seen. I was completely captivated by their charm. The girl thought that I was the most handsome of the lot. Here was I, feeling the most insipid working member of the group, being told how much superior I looked – this alongside the great Romeo John Lennon and his two stalwarts Paul and George: the Casanovas of Hamburg!*

GEORGE: They were all very nice people. It was really good for us to meet them, too, because they were more cultured than the locals. They had a great appreciation for us, but they were very artistic and interesting in themselves. They were the arty crowd around Hamburg.

We started hanging out with them. We learnt more from them at that point than they learnt from us, including style. Klaus, Astrid and Jürgen became real friends. Klaus later became a bass-player himself and played on many of my records and other people's. And Astrid was so loving; she'd take us home and feed us. She helped us a lot, even just to let us have a bath. Astrid was twenty-two at that time, and I was seventeen; she seemed so much older than me, and so grown up.

Eventually Stuart and Astrid got off with each other; Astrid was really cute – so was Stuart; you can see from their pictures that they were.

PAUL: We got in with these people very tight. Jürgen and Astrid took some early photos of us. We would go to their studio, as they had one (or they knew a man who did). We had never had this kind of treatment before.